Making Memories

By: Suzume CA

As preparations for Carmen continue, Shion has a request to make of her estranged friend: that she step down from the lead role. Chikaru, as could be expected, has other ideas.

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Ignoring the looks of mild surprise her presence drew, Shion Tōmori paced the halls of St. Lulim, hands clenched and expression intent. Her patience was beginning to wear thin as she tried to remember which of her sister school's wings housed the club rooms.

If only Lulim had a sensible floor plan, like Spica…

At long last, her search brought her to a door bearing a sign (or more accurately, a handwritten piece of paper hung with two pieces of tape) proclaiming it the meeting place of the Costume Design And Fabrication Club. Shion gave a derisive snort and opened the door without knocking. She was immediately met with the sounds of sewing machines and happily chattering voices, and a look inside revealed that this club, like so many others, consisted of four girls: Student Council President Minamoto Chikaru, inseparable second-year students Hyūga Kizuna and Natsume Remon, and that bizarre little first-year with the teddy bear, Byakudan Kagome.

After taking a slow look around the room, Shion had to admit that unlike some of Chikaru's other clubs, this one seemed to have its act together. Hand-drawn design sheets and lists of measurements were posted all over the blackboard and walls, Kagome was painstakingly cutting fabric to match a small pile of patterns, Kizuna and Remon were doing rough assembly with sewing machines, and Chikaru herself was seated on a stool in the middle of the chaos, hand-stitching something black and frilly onto a red skirt, occasionally pausing to give the youngest club member a hand with an unwieldy bolt of material.

Shion ended up watching them for several minutes before remembering the purpose of her visit, and she made an effort to clear her throat over the ambient noise of the room. "Pardon me."

The four Lulim students looked up from their work to see her, and Kizuna let out a small gasp. "President Tōmori-sama!" she squeaked.

"Good afternoon," Chikaru smiled at her. "What brings you here? Have you come to help?"

Suddenly finding herself unable to meet Chikaru's eyes, Shion glanced over the other three. "Ladies, there is an important matter I must discuss with your school president," she said in her best Official Business tone.

The three younger girls all looked to Chikaru, and she gave them a smile and a nod. "You've been working very hard, my dears: you've more than earned a break."

"But Chikaru-onee-sama, we…" Remon began.

"It's okay, Remon-chan," Chikaru assured her. "We're well ahead of schedule, and you mustn't neglect your studies. I'll see you all at dinner, then."

Shion waited while the three younger students grabbed their belongings and filed out, Remon and Kizuna casting questioning looks in her direction as they did. Once the door was closed behind them, she let out a small sigh. "Your minions are as protective of you as ever, I see."

"They're not my minions," Chikaru smirked as she returned to her stool and resumed stitching. "So, what brings you to St. Lulim, Council President Tōmori-san?"

"That's how you greet me now?" Shion snorted as she found a stool of her own and sat down.

"Considering that I never see you anymore outside of the council chambers, and considering the tone of voice with which you dismissed my 'minions,' I thought it the best way to address you this time."

"You've known me since we were in diapers, Chikaru. Do we have to be official with each other now? I didn't come here as a council president." She paused to take a steady breath before saying the next. "I'm here as a friend."

"Oh, then you *are* here to help with the sewing?" Chikaru beamed. "How wonderful!"

"Chikaru, no, I…" Shion started, then shook her head. Sometimes talking to Chikaru was like trying to catch smoke with your bare hands.

The younger girl again looked up from her sewing and fixed Shion with a smile, but her eyes were unmistakably hardened. "Then you must be here to invoke our long-neglected friendship in an effort to talk me out of playing the role of Carmen, is that it?"

Shion stared for a moment, then shook her head quickly. "Of course not!" she lied.

"I'm relieved to hear it," Chikaru nodded, returning her attention to her stitching. "Please forgive me for suggesting such a thing."

For a long time, the room was silent, though Shion fancied the other girl would be able to hear her grinding her teeth as she tried to find the right way to put this. "But… surely you must realize that Rokujō-san is using you."

Chikaru gave a tiny little chuckle, but did not look up. "Of course she is. That's how everything works around here, isn't it? In not casting Amane-san as the male lead and Etoile-sama as Carmen, she's intentionally undermining your plans to back Amane-san as an Etoile candidate, thereby increasing her chances to have the Etoile position

remain at St. Miator, in spite of not yet having a candidate of her own."

"Exactly," Shion nodded, mildly surprised that Chikaru understood the issue so thoroughly. She had always known that the Lulim president's seeming indifference in council meetings was hiding something, but her quick knowledge of the ongoing intrigues was strangely impressive.

"Yes, it's all politics, and it's all part of her ongoing vendetta against you in particular," Chikaru went on, her voice slowly taking on a very chilly tone. "Surely it had nothing at all to do with her faith in me to provide a good performance, or to acknowledge any talents or abilities that *I* might possess. She probably just drew my name out of a hat."

Shion felt her stomach drop. "Chikaru," she said softly, "I didn't mean it like…" She had to stop, though, because the reality was that she *had* meant it like that.

A most unexpected sound came from Chikaru then: a sigh of pure weariness. She looked up with uncharacteristically sad eyes and regarded her old friend. "I *miss* you, Shion," she said.

"You… you see me several times a week," Shion protested.

"No, I see Spica Student Council President Tōmori-san several times a week," Chikaru corrected her. "It's been ages since I saw my friend Shion. Do you remember the way we used to play dress-up together, you and me and Naoko? We were going to be stars of the stage and screen, every one of us. We put on plays, we practiced award speeches… well, you and I did, anyway… we dreamed of being under the lights in bright costumes…" The smile became a bit more genuine as Chikaru related this memory. "They were good dreams, Shion."

In spite of herself, Shion let a brief smile escape, remembering some of those little plays, but then her features fell. "We're not children

anymore, though."

"No, but we're not adults either: we have the rest of our lives for that, you know. What's that expression I've heard you use about the difference between Miator and Spica?"

Shion creased her forehead in thought. "What, that Miator makes good wives, and Spica makes good women?"

"That's the one," Chikaru said with a roll of the eyes. "But have you ever asked yourself the question of what Lulim makes?"

"… Okay, I'll bite. What *does* Lulim make?"

Chikaru fixed Shion with those uncanny brown eyes and smiled. "Good memories."

After letting those words hang for a few moments, Chikaru went on. "How do you expect to be remembered when you leave Astraea Hill, Shion?"

"What, other than as the first girl to graduate without kissing one of her classmates?"

"Ah, that incident with your predecessor as student council president didn't count, then?"

"How did you-?" Shion all but sputtered, narrowing her eyes at Chikaru's knowing grin. "Hm. Well played, Shadow Empress, well played."

"Honestly, though. Do you expect to be remembered as the president who restored St. Spica's honor by ensuring that the Etoile position returned to those hallowed halls?"

"It's a noble goal," Shion said, somewhat defensively.

"Honestly, though," Chikaru repeated. "In five years, ten years, when you're a holy terror in the business world, talking about your school

days with your colleagues, is that the story you'll tell them? That you manipulated events to ensure that your horse won the race, regardless of the cost to those around you? A story which would then require that you explain the intricacies and subtleties, because no one else will know the first thing about these roles and struggles that we found so *vital* when we were teenagers?"

Shion tried to protest, out of reflex if nothing else, but she quickly found that words escaped her.

"Lulim is about making memories," Chikaru said again. "It is my sincere hope that when my girls leave this school, they remember the friends they've made, the many clubs they've drifted in and out of, the joy of one another's company… And when they are asked later in life about their time here, I want them to have no end of stories to tell." Her smile deepened, and Shion saw a look of intensity in her old friend's eyes that she hadn't noticed for many years. "One of *my* stories will be that I took hold of a chance to fulfill my dreams, and for one incredible day, I was Carmen. That I took the stage, just as I'd always wanted, and shone like the brightest star."

Chikaru smiled brilliantly for a few moments more, then once more returned her attention to the skirt in her hands. "And if, in the process, I can inspire anyone else who wishes to follow her dreams, all the better. *That*, my dear Shion, is what I consider to be a noble goal."

"And woe betide any who come between the Shadow Empress of Astraea and her goals?" Shion chuckled half-heartedly.

"I wouldn't necessarily say that," Chikaru shrugged, "but make no mistake, Shion: *I want this* . As much as you want the Etoile for Spica, I want this."

With that said, Shion felt the drive and energy that had brought her here evaporating away, and she sighed heavily, admitting defeat. Realistically, though, it was only a setback, and she knew it: perhaps

they could both still fulfill their goals. "Well, I hope it turns out to be a good story, Chikaru. I have to admit, I almost wish I could share that stage with you after all."

"As do I," Chikaru nodded, but then she looked up suddenly, as though remembering something, and her grin returned, deeper than ever. "Come over here, I want to show you something."

Shion got up from her stool and followed Chikaru over to one corner of the room, where a strange wooden framework of some sort was sitting atop a dropcloth. It was roughly rectangular, and stood about three feet tall and five feet long. "What's this?" she asked.

"One of the scenes calls for a bullfight," Chikaru explained, pointing to a series of sketches taped to the wall nearby. "This will be our bull. Since it's more of a costume than a prop, though, I volunteered to make it."

"I see," Shion nodded slowly, looking at one of the drawings, which showed the outline of a person inside the frame, wearing a harness to attach the costume to herself. She glanced back at the frame, then, trying to picture what it would look like once completed.

"There is one thing, however, that Rokujo-san neglected in casting this play. She never chose anyone to play the part of the bull."

Shion went on nodding, still glancing between the drawings and the frame, but then realization hit, and she turned to see Chikaru grinning slyly at her.

"Don't you think," Chikaru asked her then, "that this would be a *much* better story to tell those future colleagues of yours?"

The End